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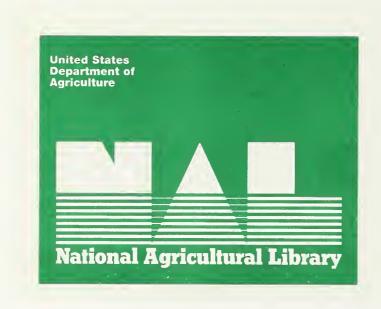


SUMMARY OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE PROPOSED ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT MINERAL WITHDRAWAL



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Cover photo: Muddy Creek Drainage



PROPOSED ROCKY MOUNTAIN MINERAL WITHDRAWAGING PREP FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT SUMMARY

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PROPOSED ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT MINERAL WITHDRAWAL FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT SUMMARY

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES BETWEEN THE DRAFT AND FINAL EIS

During the comment period 517 letters were received. To address substantive comments captured from those letters changes were made to the Geological Resources / Minerals section of the Affected Environment and Environmental Effects chapter of the EIS.

The acreage for the mineral withdrawal has been adjusted to more accurately reflect the area proposed for withdrawal. The original figure of 429,000 acres was based on an estimate from the legal description published in the Federal Register. The new figure of 420,000 acres represents acreage calculated from digital land status maps provided by the Montana state Library. This area (420,000 acres) is the total acreage within the study area. The lands already withdrawn and private lands total 15,360 acres and are subtracted from the total acreage. This brings the acreage proposed for withdrawal to approximately 405,000 acres.

The Consultation and Coordination chapter of the Final EIS (Chapter 4) includes letters from federal agencies and responses by the interdisciplinary team.

Appendix J presents a listing of the substantive public comments and responses.

PURPOSE AND NEED

INTRODUCTION

This Summary provides an "overview" of the potential environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives for managing federal locatable and hardrock mineral resources on National Forest System lands along the Rocky Mountain Front, near Choteau, Augusta, and Lincoln, Montana. While much of the detail presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Rocky Mountain Front

Mineral Withdrawal has been omitted to produce this document, the Summary is meant to provide the reader with sufficient information to understand:

- what the proposed mineral withdrawal would do and why it has been proposed;
- what alternatives to the withdrawal have been considered;
- what the setting is like and what resource uses and conditions are present in the proposed withdrawal area; and
- what changes or risks of change in the existing environmental conditions, resources, or uses may occur as a result of implementing the proposed action or no action alternatives?

The USDA Forest Service (FS) is the agency responsible for preparing the EIS. The Secretary of the Interior will use the information in the Final EIS as the basis for deciding the future management of the federal mineral resource.

BACKGROUND

On February 3, 1999, Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck announced a two-year moratorium on new mining claims on the Rocky Mountain Front and proposed to withdraw the area. The two-year period provides time for the U.S. Forest Service to complete an environmental study of a longer-term mineral "withdrawal." With the publication of a Federal Register notice on February 3, 1999, the two-year moratorium on new mining claims (known as a segregation) went into effect. Unless the Secretary of the Interior approves a mineral withdrawal by February 2, 2001, federal lands within the area will reopen to filing of new mining claims.

The General Mining Law of 1872 is the basis for appropriation of hardrock mineral resources from public lands. The Mining Law states: "All public lands that are not specifically excluded from

availability, are open and available for mineral exploration and development." A mineral withdrawal prevents filing of new mining claims on Federal lands under the General Mining Law of 1872. It closes an area to mineral location (staking mining claims) and development. It does not affect private property or valid existing claims. Withdrawals are implemented to limit mineral-related activities in order to maintain other resource values in the area (43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 2310).

GENERAL LOCATION AND GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

The proposed mineral withdrawal area (study area) is located in the Lewis & Clark and Helena National Forests along the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana, Map 1. Glacier National Park is directly north of the study area. The Great Bear, Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wildernesses border the area on the west. National Forest boundaries form the eastern and southern edge of the withdrawal area. The Blackfeet Indian Reservation is adjacent to the northeastern boundary.

The tributaries of two nationally known rivers are within the withdrawal area. The streams and rivers east of the continental divide flow into the Missouri River. West of the continental divide, the withdrawal area drains into the Blackfoot River.

The study area consists of approximately 420,000 acres of both private and federal lands. Of this, about 405,000 acres are National Forest lands. Scattered throughout the area are about 5,000 acres of private land. There are no unpatented mining claims within the study area. About 1,700 acres of federal land is currently withdrawn from mineral entry to protect administrative sites, campgrounds and reclamation projects in the area. Adjacent to the study area, the Great Bear, Scapegoat and Bob Marshall Wildernesses are also withdrawn from mineral location.

PROPOSED ACTION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service proposes to withdraw from hardrock mineral entry, National Forest System Lands along the Rocky Mountain Front, near Choteau, Augusta, and Lincoln Montana, Map 1. The proposed withdrawal would be applied on approximately 405,000 acres of currently unclaimed federal land. These lands

would be withdrawn for 20 years. In accordance with federal regulations, the mineral withdrawal would be subject to review at the end of 20 years.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The primary purpose of the proposed mineral withdrawal is to preclude future potential impacts to resources from exploration or mining activities in the area. The Rocky Mountain Front has many unique and valuable resources, which could be degraded by mineral related activities. Resources of particular concern are:

- Traditional cultural uses by Native Americans. Traditional cultural uses within the study area include religious ceremonies and gathering of traditional herbs.
- Threatened and endangered species. The study area provides habitat for several threatened and endangered species including grizzly bear, gray wolf, bull trout and bald eagle.
- Outstanding scenic values and roadless character. Many people believe the scenic qualities of the study area are among the best in the nation.

SCOPE OF THE ANALYSIS

This Summary describes the potential environmental consequences of two alternative strategies for management of federal mineral resources. No Action (no withdrawal) and the Proposed Action (withdrawal). Three additional identified alternatives were durina involvement and were considered but not analyzed in detail.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

The mineral withdrawal analysis focuses on a policy level decision concerning the appropriateness of future mining on federal lands in the area. This broader look at the area differs from a mine proposal analysis. A mine proposal analysis focuses on alternatives and mitigation designed to resolve resource issues and mitigate the effects of mining. Table 1, Nature of the Analysis, contrasts these two types of analysis.

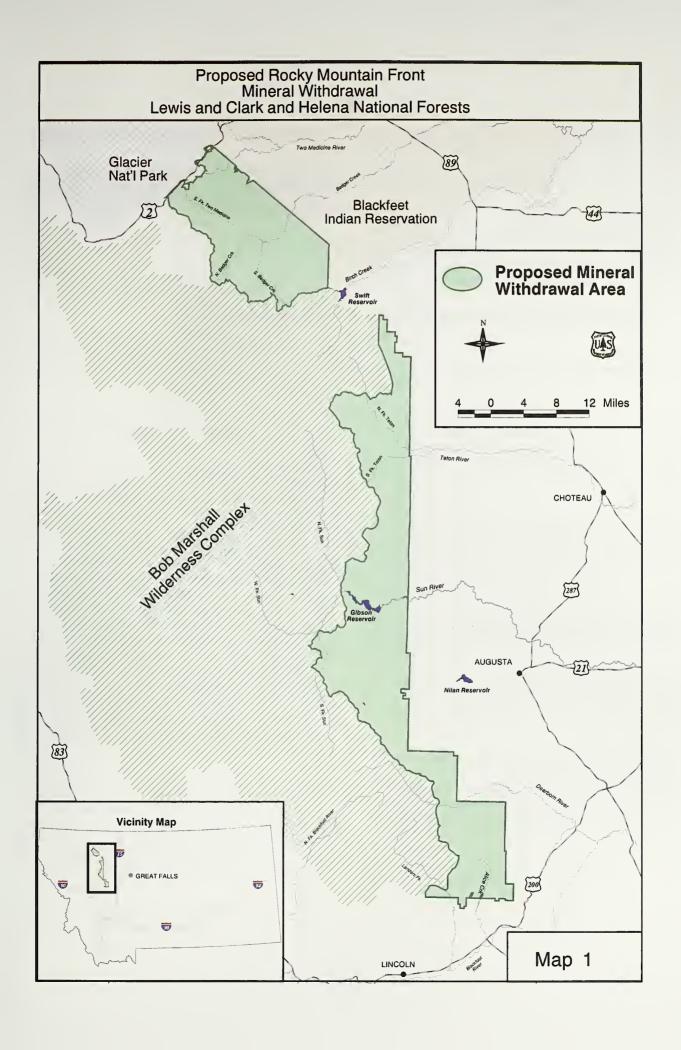


TABLE 1: NATURE OF THE ANALYSIS

Mineral Withdrawal (Policy Level Decision)	Mining Project (Site Specific Project)
Effects are largely based on assumptions about future mineral activities.	Effects are based on site-specific plans
Effects are described on an area level.	Effects are site- specific and based on location of facilities.
Effects are less easily quantified; described in terms of change, risk, and trends.	Effects are more easily quantified or measured.

Withdrawal Decision Process

The authority to withdraw lands from mineral entry lies with the Secretary of the Interior. The Chief of the Forest Service will submit his decision and the EIS to the Montana State Director, Bureau of Land Management, who will then submit recommendation to the director of the Bureau of Land Management. The recommendation and supporting documentation will then be forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for a decision. The Secretary will decide which lands, if any, to withdraw, and for how long. If the Secretary chooses to implement a withdrawal, the withdrawal would become effective on the date the Public Land Order is published in the Federal Register. The Secretary is limited to a maximum withdrawal period of 20 years (Federal Land Policy Management Act 204 (c)(1)). At the end of the 20year period, the withdrawal decision would be reviewed to determine if it is appropriate to extend

The Secretary of the Interior will advise Congress of the withdrawal action being taken, if a withdrawal of over 5,000 acres is approved. Congressional action is not required to implement the withdrawal. Congress can terminate the withdrawal by passing a concurrent resolution in

the House and Senate within 90 days of the approval of the Public Land Order.

Forest Plan Amendments

If the Secretary of the Interior withdraws the area, the Chief of the Forest Service will make concurrent amends to the Lewis & Clark and Helena National Forest Plans to reflect the change in management of hardrock minerals.

Decisions Beyond the Scope of this Analysis

The proposed mineral withdrawal does not apply to the following:

- private lands or use thereof;
- valid existing rights associated with existing unpatented mining claims;
- leasable minerals (e.g., oil, gas, coal and geothermal); saleable minerals (sand and gravel);
- rights-of-way; or
- any other authorized surface uses (including hunting, vehicle use, recreation, logging) on lands under the administration of the Lewis & Clark and Helena National Forests.

In addition, the following actions are beyond the scope of the analysis for the mineral withdrawal proposal:

- designation of the area as Wilderness, National Park or National Recreation Area (such designations require Congressional action); and
- travel management decisions on road, trail and area motorized use within the study area (such decisions are made at the District or Forest level using appropriate public involvement and environmental documentation).

ALTERNATIVES

ISSUES

The setting in which the proposed mineral withdrawal occurs influences public opinion about mineral management along the Front. Comments received during scoping indicate the public perceives this as a unique and special area. The combination of outstanding scenic values, the roadless character, the threatened, endangered and sensitive species habitat, and the traditional cultural uses contribute to area's uniqueness.

Issues directly related to the Rocky Mountain Front withdrawal proposal under the General Mining Laws include:

- How does the proposed mineral withdrawal affect the availability of minerals in the study area?
- What are the economic implications of the proposed mineral withdrawal?

Other issues that deal with resource values found in the study area include:

- What is the potential for the proposed mineral withdrawal to protect heritage resources in the study area?
- What is the potential for the proposed mineral withdrawal to protect scenery and recreation values in the study area?
- What is the potential for the proposed mineral withdrawal to protect wildlife resources in the study area, including threatened, endangered and sensitive species and their habitat?
- What is the potential for the proposed mineral withdrawal to protect the water resources in the study area?

ALTERNATIVES STUDIED IN DETAIL

The alternatives considered in detail represent two options for the management of hardrock mineral resources on federal lands. These are the "No Action" alternative (Alternative A) and the proposed action (Alternative B). There were no issues generated internally or through public scoping that

lead to the development of additional alternatives. Table 2, Summary Comparison of Alternatives, contrasts the two alternatives.

Alternative A: No Mineral Withdrawal (No Action)

This alternative is referred to as the "No Action" Alternative because no action would be taken by the Secretary of the Interior to withdraw the area from mineral location and entry. It would continue the federal minerals management that existed before February 3, 1999, when the study area was closed to location of new mining claims for a two-year study period.

Under this alternative, federal lands (approximately 405,000 acres) would remain available for mineral exploration and development under the General Mining Law of 1872. Mining claims could be staked for minerals considered "locatable" (e.g. gold, copper, silver, lead, zinc and platinum). These claims would give the claimant exclusive possessory rights to the federal mineral deposits subject to conditions under the General Mining Law of 1872 and other applicable statutes.

Under Alternative A no amendments would be made to Forest Plans.

Alternative B: Proposed Mineral Withdrawal

Alternative B is the proposed mineral withdrawal. Under this alternative, no new claims for federal hardrock minerals could be located within the 405,000-acre withdrawal area for twenty years. The withdrawal would be subject to review at the end of the twenty-year period.

Exploration and mining for hardrock minerals (including low impact recreational mining activities) would be prohibited on federal lands without valid existing rights. The proposed mineral withdrawal would not apply to private lands.

The Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans would be amended to be consistent with the terms and conditions of the mineral withdrawal.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A: No Mineral Withdrawal (No Action)

Alternative B: Proposed Mineral Withdrawal (Preferred Alternative)

Approximately 405,000 acres of federal land would remain open for mineral location and entry subject to specific management guidelines and applicable law when the existing segregation period expires on February 3, 2001.

Approximately 405,000 acres of federal land would be withdrawn from hardrock mineral location and entry for a period of 20 years. The proposed mineral withdrawal would not apply to private lands.

Exploration and mining on federal lands would be subject to surface management regulations found in 36 CFR 228 Subpart A and other applicable state and federal laws. Bonding would be required.

Exploration and mining for hardrock minerals would be prohibited on federal lands. No unpatented claims exist within the withdrawal area.

Forest plans would not be amended regarding mineral location, entry, or recreational mining.

Helena and Lewis & Clark Forest Plans would be amended to be consistent with the terms and conditions of the mineral withdrawal.

Management Common to All Alternatives

Mining-related activities on federal lands would be subject to existing surface management regulations as well as other state and federal laws.

Comparison of Alternatives

Table 2 summarizes the differences between the two alternatives.

Preferred Alternative

Alternative B is the preferred alternative.

ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

Three additional alternatives were proposed through scoping. The following alternatives were considered but not analyzed in detail for the reasons summarized below:

Extend the Period of the Proposed Withdrawal Beyond 20 Years.

This alternative was not analyzed in detail because extending the withdrawal period is outside the administrative authority of the Forest Service and the Department of Interior.

Extend the Withdrawal Area to the South.

The National Forest lands south of the proposed withdrawal have already been modified by human activities. The purpose of the mineral withdrawal is the preclude mining from sensitive areas that could be disturbed by mining. Since these areas have already been disturbed, withdrawing them would not meet the purpose and need.

Exclude the Portion of the Helena National Forest from the Mineral Withdrawal.

A recommendation was made to exclude the Helena National Forest portion of the mineral withdrawal because Alice Creek drainage is on a different Forest and west of the continental divide. This area was included in the mineral withdrawal because it met the criteria in the purpose and need.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL **EFFECTS**

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES BETWEEN THE DRAFT AND **FINAL EIS**

The discussion of mineral resource potential in the Geological Resources / Minerals section has been expanded to include several deposit types outside the study area reflect the probabilistic methods of mineral-resource assessment presently used by the U.S. Geological Survey.

INTRODUCTION

Since a mineral withdrawal is a policy decision, it does not result in surface-disturbing activities. There are no direct effects on water, wildlife, and other biological and physical resources in the study The environmental effects of mineral withdrawal are based on assumptions about potential development that could occur.

FORECAST FOR FUTURE MINERAL ACTIVITY

A mineral activity forecast was developed to estimate future hardrock mining and exploration in the study area.

The forecast estimates the types of potential mining activity their relative probability. Numerous factors such as quantity, grade, and location of known mineral reserves, the potential for other mineral occurrences in the area, land status, economics and mineral markets. technology, and the mining and environmental laws and regulations were considered in developing the forecast

The forecast is speculative in nature and is not meant to imply that the listed activities would actually occur. The forecast serves as a basis for evaluating the potential effects of a withdrawal on mineral resources in the study area and it serves as a basis for assessing the potential effects of mining-related actions to area resources.

The forecast for future mineral activity is summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3: FORECAST FOR FUTURE MINERAL ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY	ALTERNATIVE A NO MINERAL WITHDRAWAL	ALTERNATIVE B MINERAL WITHDRAWAL	
	Annual Likelihood*	Annual Likelihood*	
Prospecting, claim staking, geochemical and geophysical surveying	1/10 years	0/20 years	
Exploration drilling or trenching	1/20 years	0/20 years	
Detailed drilling	<1/1000 years	0/20 years	
Further development	<1/1400 years	0/20 years	
* Number of occurrences of the specified activity in given number of years			

ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL **EFFECTS**

The broad view of the analysis made effects disclosure difficult. The team used a risk analysis process to analyze and display effects.

The concept of risk embodies two components: the likelihood of an event occurring and the environmental consequences produced by the event should it occur. Expressed more simply:

Risk = (likelihood) x (consequences)

Each team member developed a table of consequences for their resource. Possible impacts to the resource were categorized from negligible to extreme. The likelihood of mineral activity was developed using the mineral activity forecast. Effects were determined by combining the likelihood of an event occurring and the consequences of that event.

COMPARISON OF EFFECTS

Table 4, Summary Environmental Consequences, compares alternatives by showing effects to area resources. It displays impacts for the issues discussed previously.

TABLE 4: SUMMARY ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Alternative A: No Mineral Withdrawal (No Action)

Alternative B: Proposed Mineral Withdrawal (Preferred Alternative)

LAND USE

Forecast of mineral activity assumes prospecting and claim staking, drilling and/or trenching may take place in the study area. The probability of mine development is very low. Mining-related effects are not anticipated to alter current and foreseeable land uses. Prospecting and exploration are expected to continue at historic rates.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on land use.

HERITAGE

The consequence of forecasted activities on heritage resources would range from negligible to moderate. Mining-related effects could include damage or alteration to individual cultural sites. Increased use of the area or improved access to sites could also result in damage to cultural sites.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on heritage resources.

WILDLIFE AND SENSITIVE PLANTS

The consequence of forecasted activities on wildlife and sensitive plants would range from negligible to moderate. Mining-related effects could cause loss of habitat. Increased use of the area or improved access could also result in increased mortality and/or disturbance.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on wildlife or sensitive plants.

VISUAL (Scenery)

The consequence of forecasted activities on visual resources would range from negligible to moderate. Mining-related effects could alter scenery. People may go to other areas to avoid increased activity.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on visual resources.

RECREATION

The consequence of forecasted activities on recreation resources would range from negligible to moderate. Mining-related effects could change recreation settings and displace some users from areas where they expect to travel or camp.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on recreation.

TABLE 4: SUMMARY ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES (continued)

Alternative A: No Mineral Withdrawal (No Action)

Alternative B: Proposed Mineral Withdrawal (Preferred Alternative)

ROADLESS

The consequence of forecasted activities on roadless areas would range from negligible to low. Mining-related effects could change roadless area characteristics. Natural integrity, remoteness, and opportunities for solitude could be altered.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on roadless characteristics.

ECONOMICS

The consequence of forecasted activities on economic conditions would be negligible. Mining-related effects are not anticipated to affect local or regional economies.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on economic factors.

WATER RESOURCES AND FISHERIES

The consequence of forecasted activities on water resources and fisheries would range from negligible to low. Mining-related effects could increase sedimentation rates, which could result in degradation of aquatic habitat.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on water resources or fisheries.

RESEARCH NATURAL AREAS

The consequence of forecasted activities on research natural areas would be negligible. Mining-related effects are not anticipated to occur because areas could be withdrawn from entry via a separate analysis.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on research natural areas.

AIR QUALITY

The consequence of forecasted activities on air quality would be negligible. Mining-related effects could locally increase the amount of dust and engine emissions.

Mining would not take place with proposed mineral withdrawal. There would be no impacts from mining-related activities on air quality.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

1000

PUBLIC NOTICES EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL SCOPING

1999 Feb. 3	Federal Register Notice of Proposed Withdrawal and Opportunity for Public Meeting
May 25	Briefing materials sent to Montana Governor, Offices of State Government, Congressional Aids, County Commissioners and Interested Tribes
June 1-11	Briefed Glacier, Lewis & Clark, and Teton County Commissioners
June 4	 Federal Register Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement News Release describing project and announcing dates of scoping meetings "Interested citizen" letter was sent to more than 1000 individuals and organizations
June 22	Public meeting in Choteau (38 attended)
June 24	Public meeting in Lincoln (14 attended)
July 16	Briefed BLM State Director and Staff
July 26-27	Field tour with FS Regional and Washington Office Staffs
Aug. 20	Issues letter sent to Congressional Staff, Interested Tribes and County Commissioners
Aug. 26-28	Telephone conversations with EPA in Helena and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

2000 Feb. 22	Briefed FS Washington Office and Montana Congressional Delegation
March	Briefed Governor and staff of State agencies
April	Briefed Pondera, Teton, Glacier, and Lewis and Clark County Commissioners and tribal governments
May 19	Draft EIS / Summary mailed to 890 individuals, organizations, and agencies
June 2	Federal Register Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS
June 7	Public Meeting in Lincoln, MT (12 attended)
June 8	Public Meeting in Choteau, MT (21 attented)
June 15	Briefed the new Montana BLM State Director

DISTRIBUTION AND REVIEW OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT AND SUMMARY

Copies of the Draft EIS (or the DEIS Summary) were mailed to approximately 890 persons, groups, local governments, and agencies that expressed an interest in the project.

Copies of the DEIS were provided for public review at the following locations:

- Northern Region Office, U.S. Forest Service, Missoula, Montana
- Lewis & Clark National Forest Supervisor's Office, Great Falls, Montana
- Helena National Forest Supervisor's Office, Helena, Montana
- Rocky Mountain Ranger District Office, Choteau, Montana
- Lincoln Ranger District Office, Lincoln, Montana
- Augusta Information Station, Augusta, Montana

Copies were placed in local public libraries in Great Falls, Helena, Lincoln, Choteau, Augusta, Cut Bank, Dutton, Browning, Conrad, Fairfield, and Valier, and at the Mansfield Library, University of Montana in Missoula, Montana Tech Library in Butte, Renee Library, Montana State University in Bozeman, and Montana State Library in Helena.

Copies of the document were available on the web at www.fs.fed.us/r1/lewisclark.

Copies of the document also were available from the following address:

Rocky Mountain Front Mineral Withdrawal Team 1101 15th Street North Great Falls, MT 59403

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT EIS

The official public comment period for the Draft EIS closed on July 17, 2000. The team received 517 written or e-mail comments that met the deadline. Additionally, more than 1000 "voting form" postcards were received as a result of an Of the comments organizational campaign. approximately 415 came submitted, individuals. 31 came from organizational representatives and the remainder came from other federal and state agencies. Of the individual comments, many were e-mail form letters.

Content Analysis Procedures

When received, each comment was recorded and given a unique "tracking number." Copies of all letters were sent to interdisciplinary team members for their consideration in the preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Two Forest Service employees read and coded each letter; then, reviewed each other's work. Comments were coded into categories that included: minerals, wildlife, cultural / heritage resources, roadless / Wilderness, visuals (scenery), economic, social, recreation, water, fisheries, process / planning, other alternatives, air quality, vegetation, soils and issues outside the scope of the proposal.

Comment Summary

Many of those responding to the request for comments on the DEIS supported the withdrawal proposal by citing the need to preserve and protect the wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, cultural and historical values and watershed quality of the area. Some respondents wanted the area permanently withdrawn and others wanted the area added to the Wilderness system or Glacier National Park. Many commented about the degradation of the environment as a result of hard rock mining.

However, some respondents wrote that the withdrawal proposal was unnecessary as current regulations and laws are adequate to protect resource values in the event of mine development. Others commented that the possibility of finding minerals is so remote that the withdrawal is unneeded. Others feared withdrawal was a first step to locking out the public.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE FINAL EIS AND SUMMARY

Copies of the Final EIS are being sent to approximately 1100 individuals and organizations; federal, state, and local agencies; and Native American tribes. Agencies, organizations and individuals placed on the mailing for the Final EIS / Summary were:

- Parties who requested to have their names placed on the mailing list for the project;
- Parties who participated at meetings and/or who submitted written comments on the Draft EIS;
- Federal and State agencies consulted during the preparation of the EIS; and
- Other Federal, State, tribal and local (to the study area) entities potentially affected by the proposed withdrawal.

The Final EIS will be available for public review at the locations listed on the preceding page under Distribution of the Draft EIS.







